

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Major General Kevin Bergner, Spokesman and Deputy Chief of Staff, Strategic Effects,
Multi-National Force – Iraq**

Mr. Phil Reeker, Counselor for Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Baghdad

DATE:

December 26, 2007

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Major General Kevin Bergner
Mr. Phil Reeker**

REPORTERS:

**Ben Shepard from The AFP News Agency
Brad Brooks from The Associated Press
Josh Partlow from The Washington Post
Solomon Moore with The New York Times
Tina Susman from The Los Angeles Times**

REPORTERS 1-10

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. I'm joined today by my good friend and colleague, Mr. Phil Reeker, who is the Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy here in Baghdad. And following my remarks, Phil will provide a few comments and then we'll be happy to take your questions this afternoon. The Multi-National Force joins the citizens of Iraq in condemning yesterday's attack in Beiji where it appears that members of the Oil Protective Force were targeted. This attack is further evidence of the nature of al-Qaeda, their use of indiscriminate violence, and their corrupt ideology that targets those who are protecting Iraq. We will work closely with Iraqi authorities to help them enforce the rule of law and bring the perpetrators to justice. Last Saturday at a press conference here, the Iraqi Minister of Defense, Minister Abdul Qadir, stated that it was not the desire of the Government of Iraq to see that concerned local citizens groups become a third element of the Iraqi security forces. And the coalition forces have always fully agreed with that position and are on the same sheet of music as Minister Abdul Qadir. The intent of the coalition of the concerned local citizens has never been to create another military or a separate armed force outside the Iraqi security forces. As they were first established in Anbar, they filled a gap as local villagers stepped forward to protect their neighborhoods from al-Qaeda. And today that continues as concerned local citizens are

courageously providing the local solutions to local problems even as thousands are also taking their place in the ranks of Iraqi forces and will continue to do so. There are nearly 300 communities from al Anbar to Baghdad, to the belts surrounding Baghdad, Diyala, Mosul with some 73,000 Iraqis who are bravely serving. Nearly 20,000 of those have expressed a willingness to serve in the Iraqi security forces. Those that do not join the Iraqi security forces will be afforded opportunities for job training and ultimately transition into private or public sector employment. This is a period of transition and, as we all know, transitions take time. They require confidence building and flexibility; and they require transparency and teamwork. The concerned local citizens, the Government of Iraqi, and the coalition are all focusing on exactly those issues. We continue to see increasingly effective operations by the Iraqi security forces who are suffering losses two to three times that of the coalition. Despite this, they continue to perform their duties well and grow in capability and numbers with some 110,000 added this year. Last Tuesday in Kirkuk, Iraqi police uncovered a major weapons cache during a series of pre-dawn raids. The operation, which was led by General Sarhaut, included more than 300 Iraqi police, 32 Iraqi police vehicles; and at one of the targeted sites the Iraqi police discovered what is believed to be one of the largest caches in the Kirkuk Province in recent history. The cache included

65 grenades, 83 rocket-propelled grenades, 1,000 mortar rounds, 250 explosive projectiles, some 3,000 small arms rounds, over 1,400 20 millimeter canon rounds, and more than 1,000 pounds of explosives and other material that would be used for making improvised-explosive devices. The increased capabilities of the Iraqi security forces were also demonstrated recently with the successful implementation of their security plan for Eid and travel for the Haj. Some 30,000 Iraqi citizens traveled safely to the Haj. And the broadcast images of Iraqi families enjoying the relative calm of the Eid in parks and otherwise enjoying family time is further evidence of Iraqis providing security for Iraqis. In spite of this progress, there remains much work still to do. And Minister Bolani and Minister Abdul Qadir are pressing on to further expand the capabilities of the Iraqi forces. In fact, this week the Iraqi Air Force will receive the first of five new aircraft enabling them to expand their reconnaissance and surveillance capability in support of the Iraqi ground forces. Sustainable security, though, is not just about security forces. It is dependent on Iraqi respect for and commitment to the Rule of Law. And there has been some progress on that front as well although, arguably, much more is required. Iraqi civil and criminal courts are operating and more than 4,000 cases have been tried in 2007 by the Central Criminal Court of Iraq. There are dozens of courts operating in major cities around the

country with over 1,100 judges, prosecutors, and examining magistrates applying the laws and procedures of Iraq. On the economic front we are seeing some progress as well. Just recently and locally, The National Chemical and Plastics Industries, a state-owned enterprise here, recently won a competitive bid to provide a range of products to [a] growing customer base here in Iraq. The National Chemical and Plastics Industries has about 320 paid employees now with a capacity for it to grow to some 1,800 as their business grows. As Iraq takes steps forward in both security and governance, al-Qaeda seeks to thwart and reverse that progress. In a video tape recently released by al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri identified Iraq as the most important battleground for the adherents of this extremist ideology. He not only accused the awakening groups of sedition but also accused several other countries in the region of turning their back on al-Qaeda. These comments are further proof that al-Qaeda is a common enemy in the region. Al-Qaeda's pursuit of sectarian violence, their use of torture, executions, and indiscriminate car-bomb attacks, and its Taliban ideology threaten those far beyond Iraq's borders. We applaud the efforts taken by those in the region to counter al-Qaeda. And we will continue to work closely with Iraqi forces, the government, and the citizens of Iraq to tenaciously pursue al-Qaeda and further disrupt their attempts to incite violence and sectarian strife. In that

regard, on November 8th, a senior al-Qaeda terrorist named Muhammad Sulayman Faza Shunaythir al-Zuba'i, also known as Abu Abdullah, was killed south of Samarra. Abu Abdullah was a legacy al-Qaeda terrorist and this is what we know about him. Since late 2006 he has run the AQI network operating in Salah ad Din and Anbar Provinces. Prior to this he was the regional mayor of Karma, Abu Ghraib, Zaidon, and Radwaniyah, an area that roughly spans the distance between Fallujah to western Baghdad. He was a foreign terrorist facilitator utilizing them as operators of car bombs. He directly reported to Abu Ayyoub al-Masri and had been a close associate of Zarqawi, a previous al-Qaeda in Iraq leader. He participated in the first and second battles of Fallujah and subsequently conducted numerous terrorist attacks against civilians and security forces until he was killed. Coalition and Iraqi security forces are continuing to pursue al-Qaeda to further disrupt their networks and limit their ability to establish safe havens and operating bases. As we move towards the close of 2007, a year of enormous effort and sacrifice, I would also like to recognize those of you who are covering the news in Iraq. You accept great personal and professional risk in reporting this story. Your work provides the citizens of our countries the best possible understanding of the facts here. And you fulfill an important responsibility. We simply want to acknowledge that today and express our appreciation for your

sacrifices and commitment during the year of 2007; and in many cases, many of you have been here well longer than the past year. We'd also like to thank the countless organizations and individual citizens who provided generous support to our forces throughout the year. Their efforts, particularly during the holiday period when so many troopers are far from home, mean a great deal to all of us in uniform. And on that note, there are two groups in particular that I'd like to mention. A congressional caucus, led by Congressman Randy Forbes, provided thousands of handwritten cards from families, schools, churches, synagogues, and even the president. The cards carried a message of thanks and appreciation for the sacrifice our troops make by being so far from home and doing such difficult missions as this and they were personally delivered during the congressman's trip here over the holiday. And finally, we'd like to close by recognizing the efforts of one of our own troopers, Petty Officer 2nd-Class Elizabeth Roberts, who is actually seated right here in the front, and her team of volunteers from Multi-National Force-Iraq, for assembling dozens of holiday gift packages for our wounded troops currently in the care of our Baghdad Combat Support Hospital. Petty Officer Roberts and her team make us all very proud to serve with them. And with that, I'd like to turn the mike over to Mr. Phil Reeker and following his remarks, we'll be glad to take your questions.

MR REEKER: Thank you General Bergner. As-Salāmu `Alaykum everyone. It's always a pleasure to be back with you particularly at this, our final briefing or expected to be our final briefing for 2007. I want to just associate myself with General Bergner's remarks on behalf of the Embassy and Ambassador Crocker also celebrate the many reporters and journalists, Americans, Iraqis—people of all nationalities—who have continued to cover this very important story as the future of Iraq unfolds. Once again we've seen that organizations have labeled Iraq perhaps the most dangerous place to work as a journalist in the world in 2007 and we commend you for being part of the team to cover this important story. We work together as one team with one mission. And I also want to recognize not only all of my colleagues at the U.S. Embassy, but my colleagues with Multi-National Forces-Iraq who continue to work on communications and trying to tell the people of Iraq and the people of the world about what we are doing here to make Iraq a better place. It is pretty clear that 2007 comes to an end in Iraq with Iraq as a substantially better place than where we began the year. I think we've seen the most obvious changes, of course, in the security arena; the reduction of levels of violence, particularly over the past couple of months. But we've also seen the improving capacity of the Government of Iraq to function as a government

particularly when it comes to areas in the economic field: budget execution centrally and in the provinces which has been substantially better over the last year. I think we met here just over a week ago when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice joined us and she and her counterpart, Foreign Minister Zebari, spoke to you. The secretary noted the improved conditions that she sees here in Iraq and, of course, continued to encourage the Government of Iraq to work on urgent implementation of the August 26th communiqué and to use the three-plus-one, the three-plus-one-plus-one structure—which Iraq’s leaders have found to be useful in the past—to use that to move forward. The political leaders of Iraq have, of course, been elected by the people of Iraq to work together on behalf of the people and to overcome some of the differences that are very much a part of democracy but to implement policies that will help Iraq move forward. And so we continue to work with our Iraqi counterparts and, indeed, with all the people of Iraq in what the ambassador has described as a long, hard process. But it is going to be done in a manner that will be sustainable over time to help Iraq reach its goal of being a stable, prosperous democratic country that is at peace within its borders and with its neighbors. And so with that wish, we’re happy to take your questions. Sir.

REP1:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al-Sharq Newspaper. Question to Mr. Reeker. What is your stance from the Turkish bombardment, the ongoing Turkish bombardment of the Iraqi border into northern Iraq? The second question; is there any intention to reduce the authorities of the prime minister and divert it to the president? And how do you view the recent alliance between the Iraqi [unintelligible] party and the two Kurdish parties?

MR REEKER: Let me take your first question and remind you as Secretary Rice did last week and Ambassador Crocker has said repeatedly, the U.S., Iraq, and Turkey share a common enemy in the P.K.K. We have a common interest in stopping the activities of this terrorist organization. These are Turkish decisions. We've made clear, of course, that we would be concerned about anything that leads to innocent civilian casualties or to destabilization in the north of Iraq. So we will continue to watch the situation closely. And the U.S., Iraq, and Turkey will continue to have a common interest in seeing that the activities of the P.K.K. are ended. On your second question, again, these are decisions for Iraqis and Iraq's political system to make. Iraq has a constitution. Iraq has a democratically elected government and the powers of the prime minister or any other officials will be defined under that constitution and under the laws made through the processes described in that constitution. We

watch the Iraqi political system evolve and develop. We offer advice and encouragement, as diplomats do, to help Iraq's government move forward on many of the areas which they, themselves, have described as priorities for them. But ultimately these are Iraqi decisions that need to be made. Coalitions and alignments that take place in parliaments or in politics more generally are very much a part of democracy. And in that sense, many of these actions and activities may seem new to Iraqis who spent so many years under a system where Saddam Hussein ran a country that provided no democratic freedoms to its people. But this is the new Iraq and these processes take time. And what's important is that the political leaders of Iraq use the mechanisms that they can discover together to move forward, to set aside their differences, to achieve accommodation, compromise and, ultimately, reconciliation to move forward on behalf of the people of Iraq.

REP2: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al-Salam News Channel. First question from the...question to General Bergner. Do you have or does the United States have the intention to present up-to-date technology and weapons to the Iraqi Army and police so that they can fill up their combating situation and abilities? The second question is to Mr. Reeker. The declaration that had been signed between Iraq and the

United States, did it include...between Maliki and Mr. Bush, did that include deciding the fate of the military bases in Iraq in the future? Thank you.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, let me start and say first, certainly, the United States not only has a commitment but has had a very strong commitment to help the Government of Iraq increase the capability of the Iraqi security forces. It's evident in a number of different ways. If you went to the Taji Depot today you would see crates and large quantities of new M-16 and M-4 assault rifles. You would see new armored personnel carriers, BMPs, that are lined up in the process of being transitioned to Iraqi Army units. Just this week the Iraqi Air Force will receive five new aircraft to expand its reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities. And I would just hearken back to the time that I was here in 2005 and served in Mosul and offer a comparison. That was a point where the Iraqi forces were rather lightly equipped and they were still organizing their own combat service support capability to sustain themselves. The idea of depots and the idea of training facilities like there is now in Besmayah[ph] and other places was just developing. Today you see those depots actually performing as depots and you see their training of units, brigade-sized units, getting organized and expanding the capability of the Iraqi Army. And, most visibly, you see Iraqi Army forces and police forces

operating in armored vehicles with a great deal of discipline and professionalism and pride for their service. And so the technical and technological improvements are very much a part of the U.S. commitment to work with the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior to expand those capabilities. Shukran.

MR REEKER: As to your second question, similarly the United States has a strong commitment to continue to work with Iraq into the future. As you know and indicated in your question, on November the 26th, President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki signed a joint declaration of principles. What this declaration put out was a shared statement of intent to establish some common principles that will frame our future relationship as we move into the future. That was, indeed, the first step in this process and the second step was a United Nations Security Council resolution that rolled over existing resolutions. And indeed, 2008 will be the final year of a chapter 7 resolution on Iraq. So during 2008, the third step in this process will be a robust negotiation that will move us closer to a normalized bilateral relationship between Iraq and the United States that will include a whole string of topics including security relationships; how we will interact. There will be a need to decide what our role—the role of the United States—will look like ahead. And there will be a number of issues we'll have to look at, and not just in the security realm, but

also in areas of political and diplomatic relations and economic relations. It's a broad strategic framework that we will be negotiating in the coming months. So that will very much be part of our work in 2008. It will be a year of significant change and we believe change for the better for Iraq. And the United States will continue to be on the side of the people of Iraq in helping them move forward in all these spheres.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir. I'm sorry. I thought you were pointing.

[laughter]

REP3:

I am. Ben Shepard[ph] from the AFP News Agency. I was wondering whether you could tell us just a little bit more about the Sunnis who have been involved in the awakening groups and who are now armed and who will be integrated into their security forces and what signals you are getting from the Iraqi Government on this potential dilemma.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. Well, I'll start and I'll be glad to let Phil follow up. First of all, I would start off by saying that this is, perhaps, one of the most important developments in 2007 is the commitment of Iraqi citizens at the local level to step forward and confront al-Qaeda and help

push them out of their communities. That is what this awakening about concerned local citizens, that whole discussion should start with and come back to: a decision by Iraqi citizens to confront al-Qaeda and press them out of their communities and no longer accept the ideology, the Taliban-like rule or corrupt law that was sought to be imposed, the torture and the other atrocities that al-Qaeda has committed against Iraqi citizens. That starts with a decision by Iraqi citizens to step forward and fight al-Qaeda. From the very beginning of that, even as it emerged through, largely, a tribal-led effort in al-Anbar Province, the effort has always been to first associate, align, and integrate those efforts into the legitimate security forces of Iraq. And initially that happens with just sharing information and intelligence. And it involves Iraqi Army, Iraqi police forces, and the coalition working closely with these groups so that they serve as a static security; they help thicken the protection of these communities. It also involves screening, vetting, and considering those who are qualified to be eligible to matriculate into the Iraqi police and/or the Iraqi Army. And if you just look at Anbar where this phenomenon has been underway for the longest period of time, you would see thousands of the sons of Anbar have taken their place in the Iraqi police there and also in the Iraqi Army's 1st and 7th Divisions of Anbar. That phenomenon, as you know, has grown and has expanded and has expanded in the

neighborhoods of Baghdad. It's expanded into Diyala Province. It's gone south of Baghdad. There are mixed Sunni and Shi'a concerned local citizens groups now. And they are representing more and more the diversity of the communities in which these groups are being formed. And so I would say it's not just Sunnis. It is representative, in the communities where they take place, of the citizens of Iraq. It is still largely Sunni, understand. The Government of Iraq has recently taken the decision to assume responsibility for those citizens, to transition the responsibility for financial compensation, and to accept the qualified individuals into the Iraqi security forces. And that number is roughly in the range of about 20,000 of the CLCs that have expressed such an interest in serving in the ranks of the legitimate security forces of Iraq. Now, as I mentioned earlier, this is a transition. At this time last year, this circumstance really didn't exist in Iraq. And in fact, it wasn't until the summer that it significantly expanded as the surge of operations and the surge of forces that enabled that was able to get into the communities, start reducing safe havens and operating bases, and create better conditions for local citizens to step forward and better contribute to the security of their neighborhoods. As with any transition, there is a need to help build confidence, expand the trust between individuals who at one point had been fighting against Iraqi forces or against the coalition and are now willing to serve alongside them

and work together and with their government. And so that process of confidence building and development of trust requires a significant amount of transparency, it requires dialog and all of those things take a little time. And so this is a work in progress to help bring what was and still is individual decisions by local citizens more firmly into a situation where the Government of Iraq is working hand-in-hand with them and accepting them—those that are qualified—into the Iraqi forces. All of that is underway and it is not one though where there isn't tension and there aren't friction points. Of course there will be. And that's the reason that we're focused on transparency and building more confidence as they all learn how to work together.

MR REEKER: I might just add to that and reiterate what General Bergner said that the logic behind the concerned local citizens program, the awakening movements, was always to have them link up with the Government of Iraq as General Bergner said in his opening remarks and as the ministry representatives said to you in the briefing before Christmas. The nature of those linkages is something that we are still working through and that will continue to be part of the process in 2008. But that has always been our goal. And a certain number will transition to Iraqi security forces. We've already addressed that there will be others, of course. In fact, the much larger number of

these individuals who will need to be moved into civilian jobs. Ambassador Crocker noted earlier this week that we have been through a negotiation with the Ministry of Finance where the Iraqi Ministry of Finance is going to match a \$155 million program that we will provide. So together that will be over \$300 million which will be allocated towards job creation, towards vocational education and job training to help transition these people in 2008. Some of that has already been underway through the U.S. Agency for International Development and its Community Stabilization Program. There are significant job creation elements to most of our assistance programs and that is already in train. So this will be a process. I think it will be something that will be very much the focus of our combined efforts with the Government of Iraq as we go into 2008. But we have seen that there is a significant demand for skilled labor as well as for people to join the security forces. And very much part of the legacy of our program, I think, will be to help get those laborers the correct training and assistance to put them in the jobs that are going to be so crucial for the economic growth and stability of the new Iraq.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

I would add just one other point, too, and it builds off the last comment that Phil made. At this time last year, this was not an issue in Iraq. And it was not an issue because there wasn't a sense at the

local level of people stepping forward to serve and to help protect their communities. Three months ago, there was just beginning a conversation about how many would join the Iraqi forces, how many would be provided for in some other form of employment, and how would that take place. And now the conversation is centered on the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, the Minister of Higher Education, the Minister of Industry and Minerals who are now looking within their ministries and identifying programs. For example, the technical colleges of Iraq which Iraq has had quite a significant capability in its past to teach technical trades. And now the conversation is about revitalizing those technical colleges and ensuring that they're up to the level of effort that's necessary to help provide the job expansion opportunities for the citizens of Iraq. So there are still many issues that have to be addressed. And this is one, as we said, that the transition will take time. But it's interesting to see how the conversation and how the development has evolved, just in the last several months, and that there are now ministerial decisions and efforts underway to help facilitate those transitions. Yes, sir.

REP4:

Brad Brooks with the Associated Press. Just to follow up on that a little bit. Phil, you just mentioned a phrase Ambassador Crocker used which was skilled labor. I'm just wondering if you could

define that a little bit more. And also what is the timeline for the Iraqi Government starting to pay for the CLCs? And who is going to choose how this \$300 million fund is going to be spent? And back to the first question—not to throw too many at you at the same time...

MR REEKER: You've got to keep track of it.

REP4: I mean, I'm just curious on this definition of skilled labor because we're talking about, you know, men who are militiamen essentially, right? And I'm just...I mean not to...at the risk of generalizing, I don't know the educational background of these people is, guys who are...you know what I'm saying?

MR REEKER: Yeah. No, I think I get the substance of your question and that is part of what needs to be looked at. Essentially, there are a lot of people out there who want nothing more than a good job. A job that will help them put bread on the table, to feed and support their families, so that their families can take advantage of the greater security and the potential and opportunities in the new Iraq. So job creation is going to be key. What we have already seen is the need for certain skilled labor sets, for instance, to take advantage of some of the infrastructure projects that we have funded through major contributions from the United States. So if you have a new water

plant in Nasiriyah, you want to make sure that you have people, cadres, skilled in the technology and the processes necessary to run that plant. It's an increasingly high-tech world as you all know and Iraqis have a long tradition of strength in technology and education in fairly sophisticated engineering. Some of that lagged behind during the Saddam years when the country was plundered by the dictatorship. And so there are opportunities now to look at areas where we can concentrate vocational education, specialty training, and absorb those people like any jobs program will do in many other parts of the world. So I think that's what we'll be working on. And again, it's a joint process. It's something that we do together with the Iraqis where we can offer advice and look at models in our country and in other parts of the world that we'll be able to adapt to specific conditions in Iraq. There's no set timeline. I think it's important not to get yourself tied into a particular set of dates. But clearly, as General Bergner indicated, just in the last few months we've responded to this very quickly—not only adjusting our programs and our funding to meet these specific needs that have evolved—but the Iraqis have done so as well which is another indication of the ability of government, even at the central level, to function, to govern, and that's what we'll continue to engage on. There was a third part of your question that I think I may have missed.

REP4: Repeats question off microphone.

MR REEKER: Ultimately, I mean these are programs that the Government of Iraq—obviously with the various inputs from Iraqi society in determining what priorities are, where there are needs—will work closely with us. We have extremely good relationships throughout the different ministries that General Bergner identified in helping them identify ideas that we have, what we've seen again from models that can be drawn from all over the world in how these processes can be done. But, of course, they have to be uniquely Iraqi ultimately. And that's why a conversation and a dialog needs to take place. There are a number of development agencies and others in the international community who are helping in this process as well. All these hands. Sir.

REP5: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Radio Sawa to Mr. Reeker. The American administration recently announced that there were some conditions or procedures that the Iraqi Government should do or adopt so that the American administration should support it. How would you view the work of the Iraqi Government right now? And will you continue supporting the Iraqi Government because you also asked

for the amendment for the hydrocarbon law but still nothing has been done alongside other questions? The second question to General Bergner. The American forces, both other forces or there was a surge, when do you intend to send those additional troops back home?

MR REEKER: On your first question, I think Secretary Rice as well as Ambassador Crocker and President Bush, himself, have all made clear that the United States continues to support the democratically elected Government of Iraq and the people of Iraq. I think we've made that abundantly clear through the blood and the treasure that we have invested alongside our Iraqi comrades in fighting for the security and stability that we've seen increased in recent months. And we will continue to pursue the broad range of activities that we do to support Iraq. I think the goals and the things that have been laid out, first and foremost, have been Iraqi goals. Indeed, our Congress and the people of the United States have an interest in this as well as we continue to invest money from the United States in Iraq's future. I think we've noted some of the progress that has been made. But just as the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi people have noted, there's more progress that needs to be made. A lot more needs to be done. Political leaders need to take advantage of the space created through the surge, that the stability that we've seen

increased, the decline in violence, to move ahead and see more national level of political progress. Grassroots level reconciliation will accomplish a lot of things. We've seen economic progress that I mentioned earlier. Execution of budgets—sending budgets to the regions. Provincial government—an entirely new concept that's part of the new Iraq taking root and playing an important role. But there does need to be a national level of dimension to all of this and that's why the Secretary and President Bush and Ambassador Crocker continue to urge that the Iraqi leadership, those elected by the Iraqi people to govern and to help make progress, work together to accommodate, to find ways of moving forward on these important legislative issues as well as other aspects of governance. And one thing they have found is a process, the three-plus-one process, which they agreed to in the joint communiqué in August. And that's why Secretary Rice reiterated again, it's time to move forward and fully implement that communiqué and take advantage of this mechanism to help move forward. And so we'll continue to work with our Iraqi counterparts and to help facilitate, where we can, their efforts to move forward in that regard as we go into the new year.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

And the other part of your question. We have said all along that the surge, by its very nature, is a temporary one and that as units hit the

rotational point, they would have to return to the United States. The factors that guide that transition are really centered on one idea and that is maintain population security while transitioning. The hard-fought gains that the Iraqi forces, the Iraqi citizens, and coalition forces have achieved over the past year are the most important consideration in that. In making sure that as the surge transitions, that the changes to the battlefield geometry as we describe it—where units are positioned and how they're positioned—are made in such a way that security is maintained even while the transition takes place. The first brigade in that rotation has already departed Iraq and has not been replaced along with Marine units that left...have already left as well. And so over the course of the spring and into the summer, you will see a continued evolution much like General Petraeus described in his briefing to the United States Congress in September where he laid out a potential path that this would take place. And the word potential, obviously, depending on the conditions and a conditions-based approach to that handover. That handover is facilitated by a number of factors. First, it's facilitated by the increase in both capability and numbers of Iraqi security forces. Now I mentioned earlier, some 110,000 had joined the ranks of the Iraqi forces over the course of this year. And they are continuing to expand. They are also...those transitions are also facilitated by the presence of concerned local citizens as we've

actually described or discussed in some detail already. They are also facilitated by the confidence of the Iraqi people and the increasing propensity they have to provide tips, to work with their forces, to work with concerned local citizens, and to work with the coalition forces as well. Those factors will help the coalition forces fight above their weight, if you will. They will help offset the reduction in coalition numbers being present by having larger security forces, the dimension of the concerned local citizens, and the increasing support of the Iraqi people. And so those are really what are enabling the transition that will see the surge start to drawdown. Shukran. Sir.

REP6: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from [unintelligible] Iraq Newspaper. Question to General Bergner. Regarding the five airplanes that you will deliver. What kind of airplanes they are and are they offensive? And are they just for surveillance or can they participate in operations?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Yeah. These aircraft are specifically designed to provide the surveillance and reconnaissance capability that Iraqi ground forces need very much. And so they are the eyes and the observation platforms, if you will, that will expand the reach of Iraqi forces. It will expand the security forces' capabilities to monitor and

safeguard their infrastructure. And it will expand their capability to provide a capability that is very heavily dependent on the coalition right now; which is what we call ISR—Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance. And so the specific purpose of the aircraft is to expand their intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability and they are equipped and organized to achieve that purpose.

REP6: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Could you answer the brand, what kind of brand names for instance?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I will find out for you and get you the specific model and type of aircraft that they are. Shukran.

REP7: Josh Partlow, The Washington Post. I want to see if you guys could expand a little bit on the U.S. military and embassy's stance toward the Turkish actions in northern Iraq. Do you support the Turkish bombing raids in northern Iraq? And what has been done to assess the level of damage and the level of casualties in that area? And can you describe anything you know about what those levels are?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I'll let you start.

MR REEKER: I think just following on what I said, the secretary has made quite clear our position on that. I think you need to direct your questions to the Government of Iraq. And I think we will continue to remind you what the leaders of Iraq and Turkey and the United States have all agreed upon and that is that the P.K.K. is a terrorist organization which is the common enemy of all of us. And at the same time we continue to urge that no one should do anything to destabilize the north. That's certainly the position that the embassy takes in this regard. And in terms of the more kinetic aspects of it...

MAJ GEN BERGNER: No, there aren't any dual positions here. I think what Phil laid out in terms of the common threat that the P.K.K. represents to all three countries, and the legitimate national security threat particularly that they represent to Turkey, and Turkey's focus on specifically targeting P.K.K. terrorists and their operations is the focus of effort.

REP7: I'm sorry. There's just been a pretty large disparity between what Turkey claims the casualty levels are and what Iraq does. [unintelligible] casualty levels are and I wanted to see if you could, you know, square those at all for me.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Those are...that's exactly why there needs to be an important

bilateral teamwork in tackling this problem. It really is...it really does require a Turkish and Iraqi dialog. And that's really what would help reconcile the kinds of questions that you're asking. But that's where it has to be directed.

MR REEKER: Certainly I'm not in a position to try to offer that from here in Baghdad. Sir, next. Down the row.

REP8: I'm Solomon Moore with The New York Times. And I wanted to ask about these job programs that you're talking about. You are relying on the Iraqi Government to kind of set those up and on tribal leaders to encourage these concerned citizens to go into these jobs and we're talking about 50,000 or so. But do you have any sense of whether these men would actually want to do that or whether these men, these particular men, are qualified to do these things? And I had one other thing I wanted to ask regarding the P.K.K. Are you providing certain imagery, intelligence to Turkey as they go forward with their offensives. And do you know what the casualty levels are there?

MR REEKER: Let me start with the first part.

REP8: Sure.

MR REEKER: On the question of the job expansion and the employment development needs to absorb many of the unemployed individuals who are currently serving in the CLCs, there's some 300 different groups here. So there isn't a monolithic summation that I could give you about their traits and characteristics. And they are as diverse as Iraq is diverse; it's a mosaic as we frequently say. In some cases you have former members of the Iraqi Army or forces who have been trained and have certain literacy levels and other capabilities. And in other cases you have others who may need actual literacy programs to help them and get into the technical skills and training programs. And this is very much going to be a shared effort in order to address the diverse needs that exist out there. Shared on the standpoint, first of all, within the Government of Iraq—and I won't presume to speak for them, but having worked with some of the different ministries on these issues—I can tell you from our discussions, that the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Industry and Minerals all have some specific capabilities they can bring to bear here whether it be revitalizing the technical colleges, whether it be establishing literacy programs for those who, certainly, need that in order to get into a technical training program, or whether it be helping with the jobs aspect of placing those people because training in itself does not create a job. Training requires a

destination afterwards for these individuals to find employment. So all of them are engaged. And that's encouraging in and of itself that they are working on how they will collaboratively tackle the different requirements. And they are different whether you're in Diyala Province or whether you're in Anbar. And they are at different stages of development as well. The security situation in Anbar Province is increasingly conducive not only to expansion of public works but also increasingly accessible to private investment that would provide the better long term, sustainable job creation effort. And so it's being worked at a number of levels. It's being worked on a cross-ministerial basis. And it's being worked in partnership with both the Counselor for Economic Transition in Iraq and the coalition. As we have some near-term capabilities we can help prime the pump and then that has to be supported by the longer term sustainable effort that comes from Iraqi commitments and from private investments. And so that's the framework, Solomon, if you will, for how we're looking at it and what's involved. And it is one that's still developing. I don't want to suggest to you that all those issues have been sorted out. But the encouraging situation we're in right now is that they are all being worked on. And I think my own assessment from having participated in those discussions with a great sincerity and great commitment. And I think, you know, it's worth noting that these things don't exist in a vacuum. I

mean there are models and experiences from which we can inform ourselves, from which Iraq and Iraqis inform themselves, in terms of market-driven forces, where needs will be for different types of skilled labor as we discussed earlier, for other types of work. I mean, the primary thing I think you find is that people want jobs. And there has certainly been many experiences, even in our own experience in the United States, of times of high unemployment and looking for ways to restructure, where to direct funds and development programs to help meet those needs. To match people who want jobs and want to pursue a better life for their family in a variety of sectors. And to have a certain flexibility to an economy which has already shown some real promise, particularly in the past year, in terms of growth and opportunities here. And I think that's what we are here, at a variety of levels, to work with the Iraqis on, and others in the international community as well, to identify those areas. And it will be an ongoing process where we want to concentrate our resources, our experiences to help them place these people. And that will, in turn, lead to further economic growth and a more positive direction not only in 2008 but well beyond that.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

And I guess the second part of your question is, really, just to come back to Phil's earlier point that we're...that these are Turkish decisions and Turkish actions and they are Turkish operations. And

they are the ones that are in the position to be arbiters of ground truth and determining what really happened. And that's where the responsibility lies.

REP8: But do you have that information? I mean, but are they sharing that information with you in terms of what kind of casualties they're looking at over there?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: That would be information they would share, if they shared it, with the European Command and EUCOM who works with the Government of Turkey. Who has not asked a question? I'm sorry, Tina.

REP9: Thank you. Tina Susman from The Los Angeles Times. A quick question on the CLCs still. Are the numbers still growing? Are you still accepting CLCs and at what point are you going to stop it? Is there a cap that's been set? And I have a question also for General Bergner. If you could talk to us a bit about the northern part of the country, particularly Salah ad Din and Ninawa Provinces, where there's been an actual increase in some U.S. troop deaths as opposed to other areas of the country where it's been decreasing.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Yeah.

REP9:

What...how concerned are you about those areas? And especially with the expected downturn in U.S. troops, what are you going to do to ensure that these places, you know, don't become what Anbar used to be?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Right. Those are good questions, Tina. Let me start with the first one. If you can think about it in these terms, the emergence of concerned local citizens has been driven by and focused on providing security at the local level in places where other forces were not capable of doing it. At the same time that that's happening, the capability of other forces to provide security, particularly Iraqi security forces, is growing. And will continue to be further fueled by the transition of concerned local citizens into either the Iraqi Army or the Iraqi police. And so you have two parallel paths, if you will. And how many concerned local citizens are necessary is really informed a great deal by how does the growth of Iraqi security forces proceed and achieve the capability to supplant and replace the security challenges at the local level. The other issue that's involved in that is the overall threat that these different communities have to contend with. And as we make progress against al-Qaeda and we make progress against other extremist groups, there is the capacity to require less. Certainly not

suggesting that's a static tradeoff. We have to constantly pursue, as we have said, al-Qaeda because just as the last couple of days have shown you, they continue to pursue spectacular attacks. They continue to try to intimidate at the local level. So this is going to continue to be a tough fight. But there are places where the security situation will get to a level of stability where the reduced number could be relevant to the security requirements and then set the conditions to transition some of them either to civilian employment or to...into the security forces. There isn't a real clear math to that and I can't tell you how much is enough. So this isn't one where we have a...what we really have is we have an objective to help transition, as we have said, into the Iraqi forces and into civilian employment and not grow this force indefinitely. It's not something that is going to grow beyond whatever the security situation requires. I can't give you a number per se today. It has been around 70,000, I think, 73,000 now for a few weeks. And I think you'll notice that it also changed as some who had been actively involved were no longer involved and so you'll see that happen as well. It's something we're watching though and it's something we know is a very complex set of relationships. What was the other part? I'm sorry. Oh, up north.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, you know, last week Mark Hertling, the Commanding

General of Multi-National Division–North came here and gave you a firsthand sense of the tough fight that is underway in MND-North. And the effort that Multi-National Division–North is putting in place to pursue al-Qaeda, to prevent them from establishing safe havens and operating bases even as, he pointed out, he sees an effort on their part to...for those who were, perhaps, displaced from somewhere else to try to re-establish exactly that in his area of responsibility. There are places now where we have not previously had concerned local citizens and/or a very well established coalition force where they are now operating. And so this is more about pursuing this enemy, pursuing al-Qaeda, keeping the pressure on them. In the process of that, we are going to have more contact. We're going to have the prospects of, tragically, more casualties. And so this is going to be a tough fight I think is the best way I would come back to describing it. And it's because we have to continue to pursue this enemy to prevent them from re-establishing themselves or creating new bases of operation. And that's, I think, what Mark Hertling, in a nutshell, described last Wednesday here. Probably the best description of all. We are at about the one hour mark and if there's one last question, we'll take it. Yes, sir.

REP10:

Damian Kavner[ph]. I just want to clarify the point that my colleague, Solomon, made. So are you saying that we're supposed

to believe that the Americans here do not know, themselves, what the casualties are up north? You guys are not aware of what the actual reality is between this wide range that we're getting? And if so, why is that the case? And, you know, is there anything you can do to sort of clarify that for us?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

I guess what I'd come back to, Damian, is to simply say these are Turkish decisions, they are Turkish actions, and they are Turkish operations where their aircraft, for example, are the ones that are conducting the operation involved. They are the ones that know and have some sense of where they operated and what was the result of that operation. And the Iraqi civilians on the ground, likewise, have a perspective on that. We don't have forces there that are the arbiters of ground truth. The military unit conducting the operation is Turkish forces and they are, in this case, the arbiter of ground truth. And that's really what I would, I think is the best description. To say that...I guess that's the only way I can describe it for you.

REP10:

Is there anything being done to try to find more information? I mean, I'm sure you...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yes.

REP10: ...have the same questions we do.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Sure we do. Sure we do. And we direct those through European Command to try to learn what they understand from the Turks' operations. That's exactly right. With that, we thank you. I don't know that we'll see you before the end of this calendar year. But again, we thank you very much for your attendance today. Masalama.